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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000507

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: HAKIM LOOKING TO UNSEAT JAFARI WITHOUT BREAKING  
SHIA COALITION

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
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11. (S) SUMMARY: SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim told the Ambassador February 17 that he wanted to work to block Ibrahim al-Jafari's nomination without breaking the Shia coalition. Hakim said he had met with Ayatollah Sistani in Najaf February 16 and found that Sistani was unhappy with Jafari's re-election and rising Sadrist influence but unsure about how to respond. Hakim said that SCIRI is ready to work with groups outside the Shia coalition to reach consensus on a government program structure and the top officials in a future cabinet. Once such an agreement is reached, Hakim suggested that the Sunni Arabs, Kurds, and Allawi forge a larger bloc and tell the Shia coalition that their nominee is unacceptable, forcing Jafari to step down rather than face the embarrassment of rejection in parliament. The Ambassador warned Hakim that other groups might not go along with this if it is merely a maneuver to revive Adel Abd al-Mahdi's candidacy. Hakim said he would be ready to look for an independent Shia candidate all sides could find acceptable.  
END SUMMARY.

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Hakim Considers the Alternatives  
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12. (S) SCIRI leader Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim told the Ambassador February 17 that he wanted to work to block Ibrahim al-Jafari's nomination without breaking the Shia coalition. Hakim ruled out Husayn al-Shahrastani as a prime minister and also ruled out Nadeem al-Jabiri. Hakim said Jabiri's nomination would only add insult to injury to the followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, all of whom would be reeling from Jafari's fall and consider the Fadhila Party a bitter rival. Hakim also said Jabiri was just as disorganized as Jafari. The Ambassador warned that Allawi and Barzani will not cooperate with an effort to simply shake up Jafari's nomination without knowing who might come next. They fear they could wind up with a worse candidate. Hakim said all sides would need to look for a Shia candidate among the independents or outside the coalition entirely. Hakim said the search for such a candidate and for figures for each of the top government posts should be the work of a special committee including representatives from the Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and Allawi's list.

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Opening a Second Track  
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13. (S) Hakim called for a second track of talks to attempt to forge a national compact that would guide the next cabinet. That meant settling on a unified approach to the chief challenges facing the next government, particularly on

security, ministerial programs, and the constitution. Adel Abd al-Mahdi told the Ambassador February 16 that the Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Allawi list and SCIRI ought to create, in one form or another, a front that ties in their key leaders, including Barzani, Talabani, Hakim, Allawi and perhaps Tariq al-Hashimi of the Iraqi Islamic Party. This group could hammer out the key compromises and perhaps serve as a nucleus for a national security council down the line.

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COMMENT: Voting as a Bloc  
Without Forming One  
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14. (S) In Hakim's vision, it may be possible to form a National Salvation Front without formally breaking the Shia coalition. This would require backroom deals and some semantics but could be the more diplomatic approach. The key leaders could reach an unannounced agreement on the government but still stand at loggerheads in public. Then, just when things appear bleakest, they could bring forward their pre-worked plan as a compromise and sell it inside their respective blocs. Jafari could step down, perhaps compensated with "leadership" of the still-standing but now damaged Shia coalition, and a new candidate could emerge. Iraq would have a National Salvation Government without a National Salvation "bloc" -- the parliament would remain divided on sectarian lines. The trick with this plan, of course, remains managing the Sadrist backlash and finding acceptable candidates.

5.(S) Hakim may not go far enough to pursue other candidates. We will find out in additional discussions with them in the coming days just how much each party is willing to push. The Ambassador was also to meet with Allawi and Talabani

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February 17 and leaders across the spectrum February 18 to push this process forward at a time when most of the leaders are still wringing their hands.  
KHALILZAD